

## Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

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USIA-15 OMB-01 DRC-01 /091 W

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R 050620Z MAR 74

FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2703

INFO AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 1318

BANGKOK PASS DEPUTY SECRETARY RUSH

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, AS, CB

SUBJECT: AUSTRALIAN ATTITUDE TOWARDS CAMBODIA

1. SUMMARY: CAMBODIAN AMBASSADOR CHHUT CHHOEUR CALLED ON ME AT THIS REQUEST MARCH 4 TO REPORT MEETING (AND ONLY ONE HE HAS HAD) WITH PRIMIN WHITLAM FEBRUARY 26. CHHUT CHHOEUR HAD ASKED FOR APPOINTMENT TO DELIVER LETTER TO WHITLAM FROM LON NOL WHICH NOTED LARGE NORTH VIETNAMESE PRESENCE IN CAMBODIA AND GKR OFFER OF CEASEFIRE, TO WHICH COMMUNISTS DID NOT REPLY. WHITLAM TOLD CAMBODIAN AMBASSADOR HE HAD THOUGHT U.S. WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR EXPANSION OF WAR INTO CAMBODIA. CHHUT CHHOEUR TOLD HIM THIS WAS NOT TRUE AND REVIEWED EVENTS OF 1970 WITH WHITLAM. WHITLAM ASKED THAT CHHUT CHHOEUR TRANSMIT MESSAGE EXTENDING HIS BEST WISHES AND HIGHEST CONSIDERATION TO LON NOL. PRIMIN'S ATTITUDE TO CAMBODIAN AMBASSADOR SURPRISINGLY CORDIAL AND ITS TIMING MAY HAVE SIGNIFICANCE. END SUMMARY

2. AT HIS REQUEST, CAMBODIAN AMBASSADOR CHHUT CHHOEUR CALLED ON ME MARCH 4 TO REPORT ON CORDIAL MEETING HE HAD WITH PRIMIN FEBRUARY 26. LON NOL HAD SENT WHITLAM  
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LETTER IN FRENCH, DATED FEBRUARY 10, WHEN WHITLAM STILL

ON SOUTHEAST ASIAN TRIP. CHHUT CHHOEUR HAD ASKED DEPT. OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS (FEB. 18) TO ARRANGE APPOINTMENT TO DELIVER LETTER AND HAD MENTIONED MATTER TO GRAHAM FEAKES (FIRST ASSISTANT SECRETARY, SOUTH ASIA DIVISION), FORMER AUSTRALIAN AMBASSADOR TO CAMBODIA.

3. WHITLAM WAS VERY FRIENDLY. HE READ LETTER, HAD SOME DIFFICULTY WITH SOME OF FRENCH WORDS IN IT, BUT CLEARLY GRASPED MAIN POINTS. HE NOTED THAT LON NOL HAD SAID THERE 25,000 NVA AND VIET CONG IN CAMBODIA AND ASKED IF THIS WERE REAL FIGURE OR ESTIMATE. CHHUT CHHOEUR REPLIED THAT FIGURE WAS ESTIMATE, AS STRENGTH COULD VARY UP OR DOWN AS NVA AND VC MOVE ACROSS VIETNAMESE BORDER. WHITLAM NOTED THAT PHNOM PENH HAD BEEN SHELLED BY ARTILLERY AND ASKED IF COMMUNISTS HAD AIMED PARTICULARLY AT PAGODAS. CHHUT CHHOEUR REPLIED THAT MESSAGE HAD STATED ONLY THAT COMMUNISTS HAD NOT SPARED PAGODAS. HE NOTED THAT LON NOL HAD PROPOSED CEASEFIRE, BUT COMMUNISTS HAD NOT RESPONDED. WHITLAM ASKED CHHUT CHHOEUR TO TRANSMIT MESSAGE EXTENDING HIS WARM WISHES AND HIGHEST CONSIDERATION TO LON NOL.

4. CHHUT CHHOEUR ASKED WHITLAM IF HE COULD DESCRIBE HIS MEETING WITH SIHANOUK IN PEKING. WHITLAM DID NOT RESPOND TO QUESTION BUT NOTED THAT HE (WHITLAM) HAD THOUGHT THE AMERICANS WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE EXPANSION OF THE WAR IN CAMBODIA. CHHUT CHHOEUR SAID THAT THIS WAS NOT TRUE, AND REVIEWED THE CIRCUMSTANCES WITH WHITLAM. I SAID I HAD ALSO NOTED THAT WHITLAM SEEMS TO HOLD THIS VIEW. I REVIEWED THE EVENTS IN CAMBODIA IN EARLY 1970, WHEN SIHANOUK WAS OVERTHROWN. NO ONE IN WASHINGTON HAD REJOICED AT THE CHANGE. I NOTED OUR CONTINUING EFFORTS TO ARRANGE NEGOTIATIONS OVER CAMBODIA, THE EFFORTS BY THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE THREE POWERS (JAPAN, MALAYSIA, INDONESIA) TO SEEK A PEACEFUL SOLUTION, THE ASEAN SUPPORT FOR A NEGOTIATED SOLUTION.

5. I SAID THAT THERE WOULD BE VALUE IN REVIEWING EVENTS OF 1970 WITH WHITLAM. WHITLAM PREDICTED ALMOST NINE MONTHS AGO THAT LON NOL GOVERNMENT WAS ABOUT TO FALL. I RECALLED THAT I HAD MENTIONED TO AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT (WHITLAM AND CAIRNS INCLUDED) MY VIEW THAT, ON BASIS OF CONFIDENTIAL

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LONG EXPERIENCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIAN AFFAIRS, I THOUGHT THIS WAS NOT LIKELY. HOWEVER, THIS WAS WHY CHHUT CHHOEUR HAD HIS PROBLEMS PRESENTING HIS CREDENTIALS LAST JULY.

6. I NOTED THAT WE HAVE HAD RECENT EVIDENCE THAT WHITLAM GOVERNMENT IS TRYING TO HAVE BETTER RELATIONS WITH U.S. WE HAVE HAD SOME ROUGH SPOTS IN OUR RELATIONS, NOTABLY LATER IN 1973 AND AFTER WHITLAM'S REMARKS AT HIS PRESS CONFERENCE

IN BANGKOK ON FEBRUARY 1. DEPUTY SECRETARY RUSH HAD A VERY CORDIAL CONVERSATION WITH WHITLAM MARCH 1 AT LUNCH WITH FOCUS ON AUSTRALIAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS. I SAID I THOUGHT IT WAS SIGNIFICANT THAT WHITLAM HAD CALLED CHHUT CHHOEUR IN TO DISCUSS LON NOL LETTER, AS IT MAY INDICATE DESIRE TO FOLLOW MORE EVEN-HANDED POLICY ON CAMBODIA. CHHUT CHHOEUR SAID HE HAD WANTED TO TELL ME ABOUT CONVERSATION WITH WHITLAM, WHICH WAS A SURPRISE. HE SPECULATED THAT REASON CONVERSATION WAS SO CORDIAL IS THAT WHITLAM CALLED HIM IN AT LAST MINUTE AND THE LEFT-WING ELEMENTS IN HIS ENTOURAGE OR DR. CAIRNS HAD NOT BEEN ABLE TO WORK ON PRIMIN IN ADVANCE OF MEETING.

7. I COMMENTED THAT IN TERMS OF CAMBODIAN POLICY IN GENERAL, IT MAY BE THAT THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT REALIZES NOT ONLY THAT THEY HAVE BEEN WRONG IN THEIR ESTIMATE OF THE SITUATION BUT ALSO THAT SIHANOUK IS NOT THE FORCE GOA HAD UNTIL RECENTLY ASSUMED IT WAS. EVEN PEKING IS SHOWING HIM LESS DEFERENCE. I NOTED THAT THE SOVIET EMBASSY IN PHNOM PENH, SUPPOSEDLY IN A CARETAKER STATUS, HAS RECENTLY HAD SOME ADDITIONS TO THE STAFF.

8. I SUMMARIZED CONVERSATION, NOTING 1) WHITLAM HAS NEVER HAD THE FULL STORY OF SIHANOUK'S DEPOSITION BY HIS OWN PEOPLE IN 1970 AND STILL BELIEVED THE U.S. WAS BEHIND IT. IT IS IMPORTANT TO DISPEL THIS IDEA; 2) WHITLAM HAD ASSUMED THE GKR WOULD FALL SHORTLY, WHICH HAS BEEN DISPROVED BY PASSAGE OF TIME; 3) WHITLAM HAS REGARDED SIHANOUK AS A MAJOR FORCE BUT MAY BE RECONSIDERING THIS VIEW; 4) REINFORCING THE PREVIOUS POINT, I NOTED THAT SIHANOUK HAS FAILED TO SPEAK OUT FOR A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT, ALTHOUGH, NOTABLY IN HIS FEBRUARY 15 COMMENTARY ON AN ARTICLE IN LE MONDE, SIHANOUK HAD BEEN ON DEFENSIVE. CONFIDENTIAL

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## Message Attributes

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